

The December species is rather obviously a thrush—an impression provided by the speckled breast, tubular bill, large head and eye, long legs, and fairly short tail.

Determining that this bird is a thrush is tantamount to identifying it to the species level. Three features are most useful when distinguishing between the five common, speckle-breasted, eastern thrushes—Wood, Hermit, Swainson's, Gray-cheeked, and Veery. These are back and tail coloration, head and face pattern, and shape and extent of ventral spots.

Since it is impossible to determine the color tone of the back of the pictured thrush, identification is limited to characteristics of the face pattern and the breast spots. Examination of the face reveals the semblance of a faint broken eye ring. Additionally, there appears to be little evidence of a strongly spectacled face, which is the impression normally created by a bold eye ring and a connecting pale bar on the lores (the feathering between the eye and bill). The combination of an indistinct broken eye ring and the lack of obvious spectacles remove the more extensively spotted Wood Thrush and the boldly spectacled Swainson's Thrush as identification candidates. Likewise, the Hermit Thrush ordinarily displays a complete eye ring and rather bold, oblong or tear-shaped breast spots. The Gray-cheeked Thrush can be eliminated by the fact that it has a plain face that barely shows a trace of an eye ring or contrasting loreal area.

Collectively, the features shown in the photograph lead to the conclusion that the bird is a Veery (*Catharus fuscescens*). The most important additional supporting evidence is the rather light and reduced spotting pattern across the upper breast. All of the remaining four confusing thrushes display heavier breast spotting. If the picture were in color, the rich reddish-brown tone of the Veery's back would also eliminate confusion with the gray-brown dorsal coloration of

the Swainson's and Hermit thrushes. The Veery in the picture, a shy and retiring species of rich woods and swamps, was photographed during migration at the Dry Tortugas in Florida.



Veery
Photo by
Wayne R. Petersen

AT A GLANCE

Photo by Simon Perkins



Can you identify this bird?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.

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